

PRESS NOTE

India Rivers Week 2021 concludes with a pledge to work for fish, fishers and healthy rivers

Activist Raj Kumar Sinha and Affected Citizens of Teesta awarded the Bhagirath Prayas Samman

Anupam Mishra Memorial Medal conferred upon journalists Abhay Mishra and Athar Parvaiz

India, November 27, 2021

India Rivers Week 2021 concluded today with a pledge to work towards protection of inland fisheries, fishers and rivers for their conservation and rejuvenation. The annual event, organised by the India Rivers Forum (IRF) since 2014, saw bureaucrats, activists, academicians and community leaders participating in five riveting virtual sessions.

The program started on November 8 with an inaugural event focussed on impacts of river pollution on fisheries and fishers followed by subsequent sessions on fragmented rivers (dams, barrages and embankments), the need for better science, data and advocacy, the changing political economy of riverine fisheries and finally the national event on issues around governance.

India Rivers Forum continued with the tradition of celebrating the endeavours of people and organisations working on rivers by bestowing the Bhagirath Prayaas Samman (BPS) on activist Raj Kumar Sinha and Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT). The Anupam Mishra Memorial Medal, conferred upon a media professional with a creditable track record of writings on rivers, was given to author- journalist Abhay Mishra and journalist Athar Parvaiz.

Raj Kumar Sinha has been working for last 30 years towards protection of Narmada river and communities living along the river. His organisation, Bargi Bandh Visthapit Evam Prabhavit Sangh, has been campaigning against destructive projects in upper reaches of Narmada River and fighting for rights of people affected by the Bargi dam. Thanks to the collective efforts, the Adivasi, Dalit and other marginalised groups of the region have succeeded in winning the right to cultivate the reservoir bed and fish in its waters, ensuring equitable rehabilitation and water usage.

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The Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) is an organisation of the indigenous Lepchas of Sikkim, raising awareness against the cascades of hydropower projects that threaten the Teesta river and its tributaries for last 20 years. ACT drew inspiration from the traditional knowledge and spiritual attachment of the Lepchas to mobilise people and succeeded in halting a number of destructive dam projects and challenging others.

Winner of Anupam Mishra Memorial Medal, Abhay Mishra has reported in depth and with verve on the state of the river Ganga for more than a decade, travelling several times from source to sea to observe and understand events and processes along its banks. His book 'Dar Dar Gange', co-authored with Pankaj Ramendu, vividly portrays the conflicts and contradictions that beset this sacred river from Gangotri to Gangasagar. He has also creatively explored the likely rippling impacts of a dam breach disaster in 'Maati Manus Chun', a work of speculative fiction rendered convincingly by the careful research that underlies it.

Journalist Athar Parvaiz has reported with great insight and courage on various issues related to rivers in Jammu and Kashmir. His writings have addressed river pollution, sand mining, encroachment on floodplains, as well as the impacts of dams and hydropower projects besides creating awareness about the vital ecological links between rivers and wetlands, and how floods ensue when that relationship is severed. Working under extremely difficult circumstances, Athar Parvaiz has succeeded in upholding the highest standards of investigation and analysis.

The consortium of India Rivers Forum consists of:

Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & the Environment (ATREE) | Indian Institute of Human Settlements (IIHS) | Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) | PEACE Institute | People's Science Institute Dehradun | South Asia Network on Dams Rivers and People (SANDRP) Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM) | Toxics Link | Veditum India Foundation | WWF India.

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